



TIPS FOR COPING STRESS REDUCTION

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Times are uncertain. We are experiencing a worldwide pandemic. Countries and borders are shutting down. Some of us are in areas that are hot spots for coronavirus. Many of us stay glued to the news, wondering, “what will happen next?” This is not easy to embrace. Humans do not like uncertainty.

With so much unknown, it is normal to feel stressed. While this reaction is understandable, it can wreak havoc when there is a sense of uncertainty and conflicting information around us. None of us was prepared to simultaneously juggle zoom calls, parent quarantined kids, change diapers or help children to log into online learning all while finding the time to cook three meals and several snacks per day. Parents were also ill - prepared to support their kids who formerly were over-scheduled but now have to navigate endless down time, screen time and no real-time friendships. People were not prepared to dodge the disease, worry about leaving the house, and then return from grocery shopping only to wash their hands incessantly and disinfect the bags in which the food was packaged.

With stressors such as these, our overall well-being is likely to suffer, without us even being aware it is happening. Some of us may feel more anxious, on edge, depressed, and frustrated. Those with underlying mental health issues will feel this even more intensely.

During this precarious time, it is important to gain perspective and to know that we are not helpless. We can arm ourselves with tools and choices. Here are some things we can do to take care of our mental health in the face of uncertainty:

1. Accept That it’s Normal to be Stressed Out Right Now. Don’t Judge Yourself For How You’re Feeling:

One of the first steps to coping with anxiety and uncertainty is to recognize that it is a normal and reasonable response. Symptoms of stress, like

elevated heart rate and racing thoughts, evolved as the body's way of signaling to your brain that it is in danger. This is what is commonly known as "flight or fight" and is a basic human instinct. Keep in mind that stress tells us that something is off and that we need to adjust. We cannot simply do away with stress; we have to find ways to manage and cope with it.

2. Separate What Is in Your Control From What is Not:

There are things you can do, and it's helpful to focus on those, not on what you cannot control. Stay home. Wash your hands. Remind others to wash theirs. Take your medicines and supplements. Limit your consumption of news to certain times per day and only from reliable sources. Take care of yourself.

3. Stick With a Routine:

Having a daily routine in place can help you to feel grounded. Try to: wake up at the same time every day; eat regular meals; do an at-home workout; get your work done; plan for enjoyable activities etc.

4. Get Outside in Nature:

Get outside; you can still walk through nature while keeping a safe distance from others. Take several walks a day. Get your dose of vitamin D; don't stay inside all day. Exercise also helps both your physical and mental health.

5. Challenge Yourself to Stay in the Present:

You may not only be worrying about current events, but also projecting into the future. You might be concerned about the state of the economy, whether you will have a job next week, whether your sister will be able to have her wedding this spring, or whether your aging parents will be able to survive without catching this virus. These are real concerns. Some you can prepare for; others you have no control over. When you find yourself worrying about something that hasn't happened, gently bring yourself back to the present. Engaging in mindfulness activities is one way to stay grounded when things feel beyond your control.

6. Stay Connected—Even When Physically Isolated:

Humans are social animals, hard-wired for connection. Social distancing comes with risks. Staying in isolation can cause depression. Prioritize connections. Do what you can to schedule daily check-ins with friends and family. Join an online support group. Utilize social media to stay connected to your community. Remember, you are not in this alone.

7. Prioritize Exercise and Proper Nutrition:

This is always good advice, but it's worth emphasizing during times of uncertainty. Since you cannot get to a gym, there are many online at-home workouts available. Anxiety increases the stress hormones - adrenaline and cortisol. Physical exercise reduces the levels of these hormones and stimulates the production of endorphins, which serve to elevate mood and well-being. Although it is tempting to seek comfort in food, sticking to a healthy diet is also important and can also help improve your outlook. A recent study found that a Mediterranean-style diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein help reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety among a group of young adults.

8. Don't Let Coronavirus Be the Center of All Your Conversations:

Keep in mind, there was a life before coronavirus. There are other topics of conversations. When connecting with others, try to take a break from the stress. Remember to laugh and try to find ways to enjoy the company of others, apart from this misfortune.

9. Seek Professional Help:

If your mental health is being impacted by the stress of the coronavirus, then you may want to seek professional help. A licensed mental health professional can help you to manage your fears while also empowering you to make the best decisions for you and your family. Most, if not all mental health professionals, are practicing Tele Mental Health now and can provide support during this stressful time. You do not have to be alone with your worry, and it is okay to ask for help from a professional.

For support during this time, please call our Care Navigation Line at 1-866-JFCS-NOW or go to www.jfcsphilly.org/supportforhealthcareprofessionals

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number is 1-800-273-8255